

The Road to Lexington and Concord

One American's Story

At dawn on April 19, 1775, Captain John Parker and 70 of his men stood on the grassy common at the center of Lexington, a village near Boston. The men under Parker's command belonged to the local **militia**—a force of armed civilians pledged to defend their community. About one-third of the Lexington militia were **Minutemen**, colonists trained to be “ready to act at a minute’s warning.” A soldier described what happened next:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“There suddenly appeared a Number of King’s troops . . . They were . . . on a quick pace Towards us with Three officers in there front on horse back and on full gallop Towards us the foremost of which cryed through down your arms you villains you Rebels.” ”

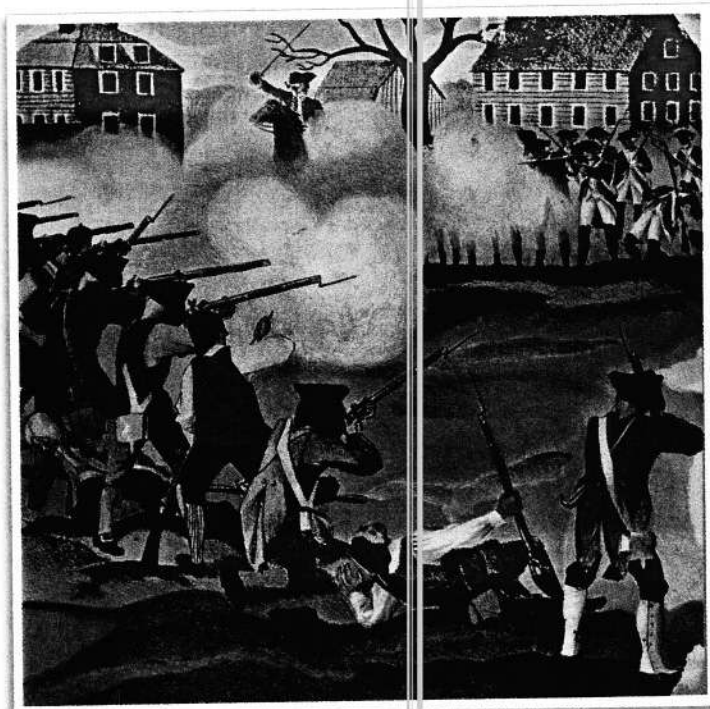
—John Robbins, quoted in *Redcoats and Rebels*

Captain Parker was wounded and eight of his men were killed in the first fighting of the War of Independence. Colonial protests had turned into violent revolution.

The Intolerable Acts

KEY QUESTION What rights were threatened by the Intolerable Acts?

The Boston Tea Party infuriated Parliament. One British official said the people of Boston “ought to be knocked about their ears.” King George III



Colonists battle Redcoats at Lexington, 1775.

declared, "We must master them or totally leave them to themselves and treat them as aliens." Britain chose to "master" the colonies.

Attacks on Rights and Liberties In 1774, Parliament passed a series of laws to punish the Massachusetts colony and to clamp down on resistance in other colonies. The British called these laws the Coercive Acts, but they were so harsh that the colonists called them the **Intolerable Acts**. These acts were a direct attack on colonists' traditional rights and liberties, because they

- closed the port of Boston until colonists paid for the destroyed tea
- altered the Massachusetts charter to ban town meetings
- replaced the elected council with an appointed one
- increased the governor's power over the colonists
- protected British officials accused of crimes in the colonies from being tried by colonists
- allowed British officers to house troops in private dwellings

To enforce the acts, Parliament appointed General Thomas Gage governor of Massachusetts.

ANALYZING *Political Cartoons*

HISTORICAL CARTOONS

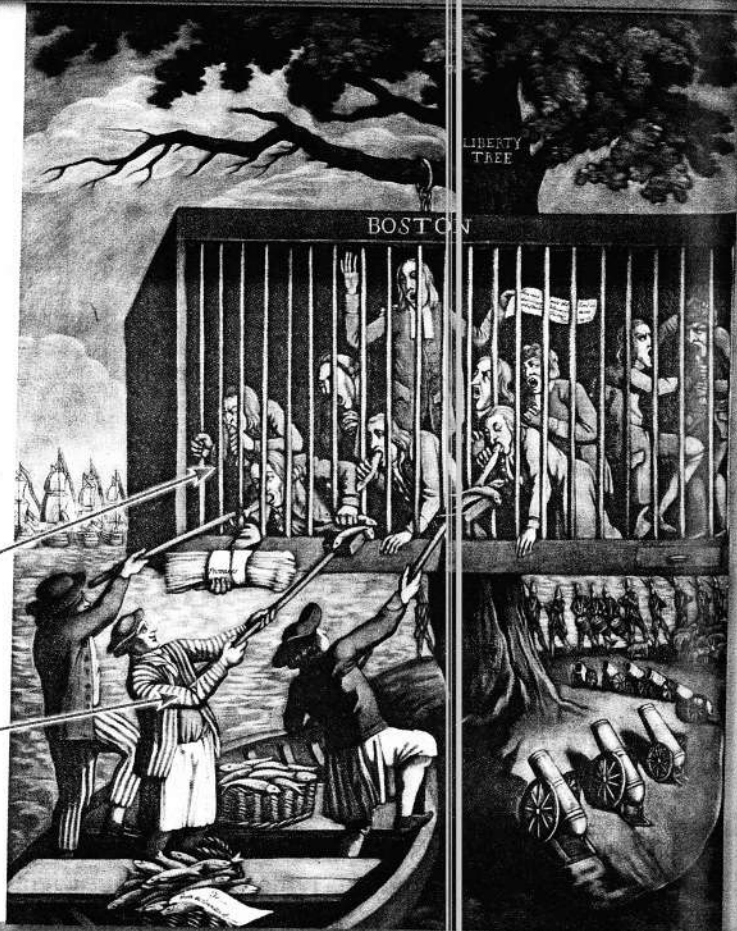
Historical cartoons show how people viewed the important events of their time. Each cartoon on these pages expresses the point of view of the cartoonist. Notice how the cartoonists use symbols, exaggeration, and humor to get their points across.

The Bostonians in Distress

This cartoon uses symbols to show the situation in Boston after the Intolerable Acts stopped all ships from entering the town's harbors.

Bostonians are trapped in a cage symbolizing the restrictions of the Intolerable Acts.

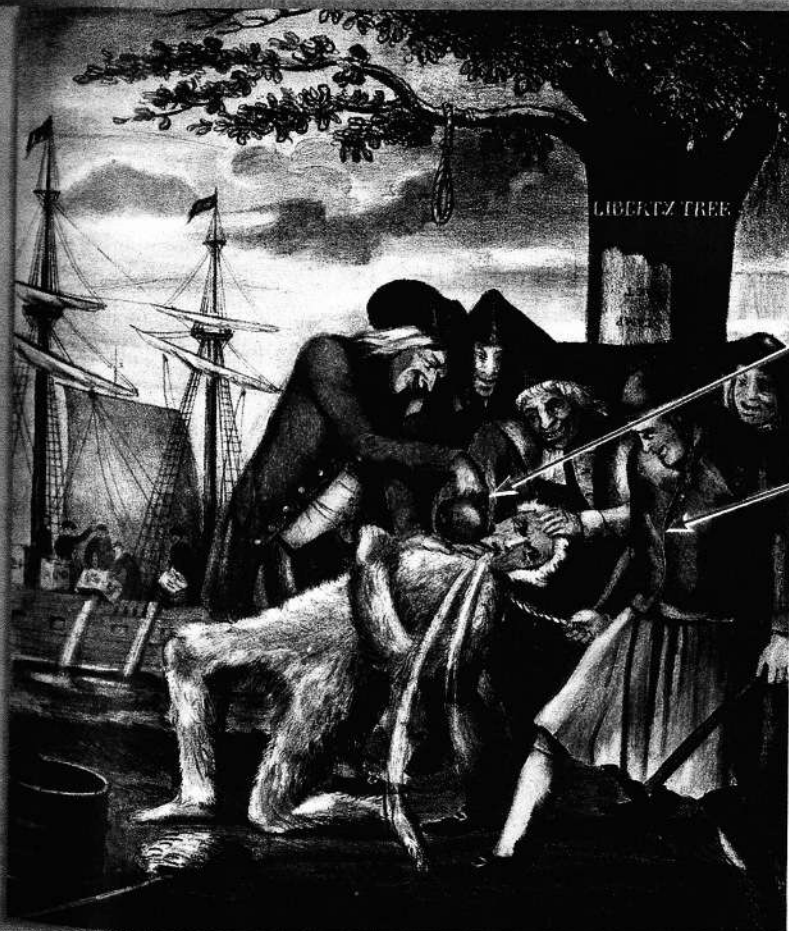
Other colonists are shown helping the Bostonians by feeding them fish.



The First Continental Congress Meets In 1772, Sam Adams had written, "I wish we could arouse the continent." The Intolerable Acts answered his wish. Other colonies immediately offered Massachusetts their support. They sent food and money to Boston. The committees of correspondence also called for a meeting of colonial delegates to discuss what to do next.

In September 1774, delegates from all the colonies except Georgia met in Philadelphia. At this meeting, called the **First Continental Congress**, delegates voted to ban all trade with Britain until the Intolerable Acts were repealed. They also called on each colony to begin training troops. Georgia agreed to be a part of the actions of the Congress even though it had voted not to send delegates.

The First Continental Congress marked a key step in American history. Although most delegates were not ready to call for independence, they were determined to uphold colonial rights. This meeting planted the seeds of a future independent government. John Adams called it "a nursery of American statesmen." The delegates agreed to meet again in seven months.



The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man

This cartoon was published in London in 1774. It shows how Tories (those supporting the King) viewed colonial protests.

A customs officer, who has been tarred and feathered; is being tormented.

The protesters are shown as violent thugs.

CRITICAL THINKING

1. **Make Inferences** Which cartoon is sympathetic to the colonists?
2. **Synthesize** How would these images have helped unite the colonists against British policies?



See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R24.



History Makers

Abigail Adams 1744–1818

Abigail Smith was born on November 11, 1744, in Weymouth, Massachusetts. She married John Adams in 1764, the same year that Britain enacted the Sugar Act. She was often left alone to manage the family farm and raise their children.

During their long separations, Abigail wrote her husband many letters about government and politics. Often she expressed her opinions to her husband and even gave him advice when creating new laws. In one letter, Abigail asked John to give women more rights. "Remember the ladies," she wrote him, "and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors." Abigail's views were well ahead of her time, although it was years before women achieved equal rights.

CRITICAL THINKING Draw Conclusions What might Abigail Adams think about women's rights today?



**ONLINE
BIOGRAPHY**

For more on Abigail Adams, go to the Research & Writing Center @ ClassZone.com

British Control Begins to Slip The colonists hoped that another trade boycott would force a repeal of the Intolerable Acts. After all, past boycotts had led to the repeal of the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts. This time, however, Parliament stood firm. It even increased restrictions on colonial trade and sent more troops in the colonies. However, in the countryside, British authorities were already losing control of government. Throughout the colonies, Americans acted forcefully to reestablish the rights that Parliament was taking away. In the summer of 1774 in towns throughout Massachusetts, large crowds gathered to prevent British-appointed judges from holding court. They also forced many unelected officials to resign. In defiance of the royal governor, the people of Massachusetts elected a provincial congress with the power to collect its own taxes and raise its own army.

By the end of 1774, some colonists were preparing to fight. In Massachusetts, John Hancock headed the Committee of Safety, which had the power to call out the militia. In Virginia, House of Burgess member Patrick Henry delivered his most famous speech, calling for war:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? . . . I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”

—Patrick Henry, quoted in *Patriots*

But most colonial leaders believed that any fight with Britain would be short. They thought that a public show of force would make the British Parliament change its policies.

SUMMARIZE Explain what rights were threatened by the Intolerable Acts.

The Revolution Begins

KEY QUESTION Why did the fighting begin at Lexington?

Since 1770, Sam Adams had been building a network of informants to keep watch over British activities. The British had their spies too. It was from these spies that General Gage learned that the Massachusetts militia was storing arms and ammunition in Concord, about 20 miles northwest of Boston. He also heard that Sam Adams and John Hancock were nearby in Lexington. On the night of April 18, 1775, Gage ordered his troops to arrest Adams and Hancock in Lexington and to destroy the supplies in Concord.

The Midnight Ride The Sons of Liberty had prepared for this moment. Paul Revere, a Boston silversmith, and a second messenger, William Dawes, were sent to spread the news about British troop movements. Revere would cross the harbor from Boston to Charlestown. From there he would ride to Lexington and Concord. Dawes would take the land route.

Revere had arranged a system of signals to alert colonists across the harbor in Charlestown. One lantern burning in the Old North Church steeple signaled that the British troops were taking the land route out of Boston; two lamps meant that the troops were leaving Boston by water.

CONNECTING History

NEW ENGLANDERS OPPOSE THE KING

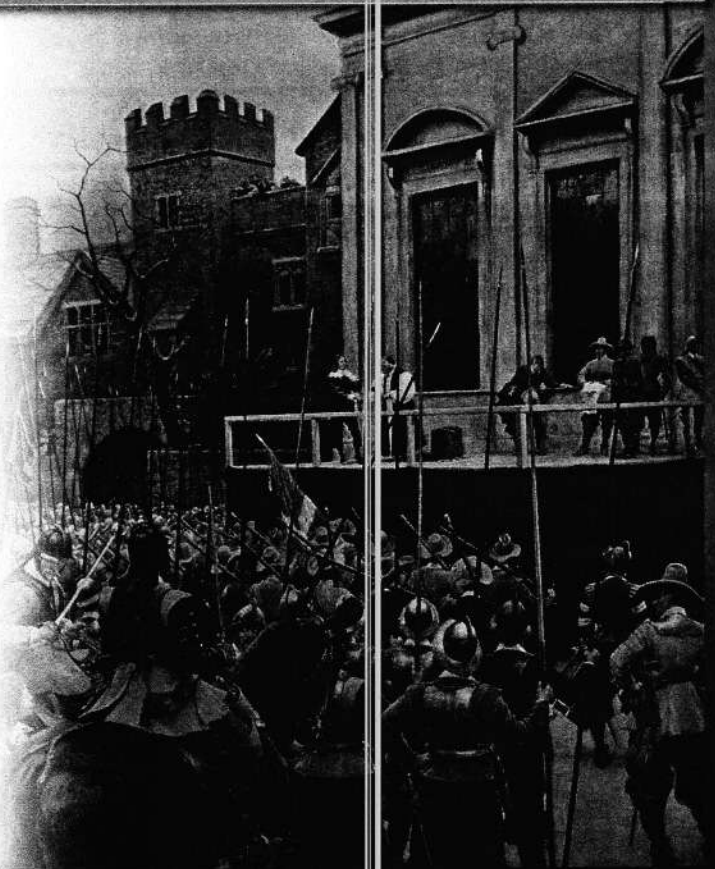
New Englanders had a long history of fierce opposition to royal authority. During the English Civil War of the 1640s, many New England Puritans returned to England to fight the king. They rejoiced when a republic was set up in England following the king's execution.

Over a century later, in the 1760s and 1770s, descendants of the Puritans were still angered by the same issues that had upset their ancestors:

- the levying of taxes without the people's consent
- the extent of the king's power
- the creation of a standing army that might threaten their freedom

Puritans execute King Charles I in London in 1649.

CRITICAL THINKING **Make Generalizations** Why was New England a hotbed of political protest?



Connect to the World

Revolutionary Ideals

Throughout the world many people were influenced by the American rebellion. In the following decades, uprisings in Europe, South America and the Caribbean would be inspired by similar ideals of liberty and freedom.

When the British moved, so did Revere and Dawes. They galloped over the countryside on their "midnight ride," spreading the news. In Lexington, they were joined by Dr. Samuel Prescott. When Revere and Dawes were stopped by a British patrol, Prescott broke away and carried the message to Concord.

Lexington and Concord At dawn on April 19, 1775, more than 700 British troops reached Lexington. There they found Captain John Parker and about 70 colonial militiamen waiting. The British commander ordered the Americans to drop their muskets. The colonists refused. No one knows who fired first, but within a few minutes eight militiamen lay dead. The British then marched to Concord, where they destroyed military supplies. A battle broke out at a bridge north of town, forcing the British to retreat.

Nearly 4,000 Minutemen and militiamen arrived in the area. They lined the road from Concord to Lexington and peppered the retreating redcoats with musket fire. "It seemed as if men came down from the clouds," one British soldier later recalled. Only the arrival of 1,000 more troops saved the British from total destruction as they scrambled back to Boston.

Lexington and Concord were the first battles of the Revolutionary War. As Ralph Waldo Emerson later wrote, colonial troops had fired the "shot heard 'round the world." Americans would now have to choose sides and back up their political beliefs by force of arms. Those who supported the British were called **Loyalists**. Those who sided with the rebels were known as **Patriots**. The Revolution had begun.

▲ **CAUSES AND EFFECTS** Explain why fighting began at Lexington.

3

Section Assessment



ONLINE QUIZ

For test practice, go to
Interactive Review @ ClassZone.com

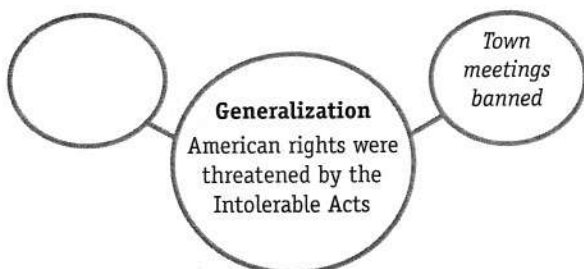
TERMS & NAMES

1. Explain the importance of

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Minutemen | • Paul Revere |
| • Intolerable Acts | • Lexington and Concord |
| • First Continental Congress | • Loyalists |
| | • Patriots |

USING YOUR READING NOTES

2. **Make Generalizations** Complete the diagram that you started at the beginning of this section.



KEY IDEAS

- Why did Britain pass the Intolerable Acts?
- Why were British troops sent to Concord?

CRITICAL THINKING

- Draw Conclusions** Why did the colonists fear the Intolerable Acts?
- Analyze Causes** What democratic traditions were threatened by Parliament's policies?
- Make Inferences** Why were the British worried about the weapons being stored in Lexington?
- Geography** In the 18th century the landscape of Boston was very different than it is today. Research and write a short paper on how much the landscape around Boston has changed, or build a model of Boston in the 18th century.